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ABSTRACT

A university associates program is designed to bring secondary school English teachers in the United States to the freshman composition classrooms of a large university. Upon recommendation by their superintendents and with one-year sabbatical leaves funded at half-salary by their school districts, those selected teach three sections of freshman composition and participate in a writing seminar, for which the university pays a maximum salary of $10,000. They participate in a week-long orientation session prior to beginning their teaching assignments and meet regularly with freshman rhetoric advisors. Results of the program include the interchange of ideas in the writing seminar between associates and regular faculty and the availability of the associates as resource people in their home school districts. (AEA)

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HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

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The University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign has a long history of working strenuously to achieve articulation with public school teachers, and particularly with teachers of English. Since 1908, before there was a National Council of Teachers of English, the University lent its financial support to the Illinois Association of Teachers of English and has, through the years, borne all or part of the cost of publishing the Illinois English Bulletin. The University sponsors two yearly articulation conferences, one with secondary school teachers of English and one with community college teachers of English.

The University Associates in Rhetoric Program

Given this background, it is understandable that the University cooperated fully when, in February of 1978, I proposed that we bring to the campus each year a small number of highly qualified secondary school teachers of English to spend a year on the campus teaching freshman composition (still called Rhetoric at the University) and taking courses in the Department of English.

I proposed essentially that we aim ultimately to bring about ten

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teachers into the program each year. Each would teach three sections of rhetoric and would be required to take the Pro-Seminar in Writing during the fall semester. They might register for other courses as well, as their schedules permitted and as their interests dictated. These teachers would be designated University Associates in Rhetoric. Each Associate would hold a master's degree in English or in English Education and would have taught long enough (usually six or seven years) to qualify for a sabbatical leave from the sponsoring district. Nominations for positions in the program were to be made by either the Superintendent of Schools or by the English Supervisor in the sponsoring district, which was asked to commit itself to paying the nominee half salary during his/her year of residence in the Program. The University agreed to pay the other half of the salary, with a minimum payment of $9,000 for nine months and a maximum of $10,000.

The Head of the English Department approved my proposal within twenty-four hours and passed it on to the Director of the School of Humanities who immediately endorsed it. Within three weeks, an announcement of the program was sent to something in the neighborhood of one thousand superintendents of schools throughout the country and nominations were invited from them.

Naturally, the time for implementing the program was shorter than I might have wished. I realized that it would not be easy for school districts to commit themselves to granting sabbatical leaves on such short notice. Nevertheless, before the May deadline had arrived, twenty-two applications had come in, and an initial group of six Associates was admitted. Of these,

two had to defer coming until the 1979-80 academic year, and they are presently in residence.

Now the program is quite well established. Notices go to all NCTE affiliate publications in the late summer, and many of these publications print notices of the Program. By the first week in October, announcements and nomination forms are sent to about one thousand superintendents of school in all fifty states as well as in Puerto Rico, Guam, and many Canadian provinces. Completed applications must be in by January 15 and the appointment of Associates is announced early in April.

The response to the Program has been substantial. National publicity in Today's Education has brought numerous inquiries, as will a forthcoming article in the ADE Bulletin. The 1979-80 group of Associates consists of seven people, two each from Illinois and Washington State, one from New York State, one from California, and one from Indiana. Last year's group came from New York State, the District of Columbia, Utah, and Wisconsin.

Training Elements of the Program

Associates are provided with textbooks and with the instructor's handbook for freshman rhetoric shortly after they are accepted into the program so that they can familiarize themselves very early with the basic teaching materials which are used in freshman rhetoric at the University of Illinois. Appointees are expected to come to the campus a week before the beginning of classes--most of them arrive considerably earlier--to participate in a week-long orientation session which the Director of Freshman Rhetoric, the Assistant Director, and the six freshman advisors conduct. The topics covered in this orientation are as follows:

The Handbook: Any Questions?

An Overview of the Rhetoric Program

Tour of the English Building

Organizing a Coherent Composition Course

Designing a Course Syllabus

Teaching Thesis and Stance— Several Approaches

Teaching Grammar

Designing Effective and Varied Writing Assignments, and Evaluating Them

Evaluating Student Writing: The Graded and Ungraded Theme

The Department Bureacracy

The First Day and the First-Day Handout

The First Impromptu

What Can I Really Expect From My Students?

An Introduction to the Library

It has been the consensus of the Associates that the orientation sessions are worthwhile and necessary. Each freshman advisor, who works for the full year with a group of those teaching in the program for the first time, be they Associates or teaching assistants, has at least one Associate in his/her group because we feel that the Associates should be exposed to as many of their teaching colleagues as possible and should have as much professional interchange as possible with everyone who is teaching in the freshman program.

When the orientation is over, Associates still have regular meetings with their advisors. They also work closely with the Director of Freshman

Rhetoric, who teaches the Pro-Seminar in Writing in which they are enrolled. The Associates quickly become involved in the social and professional life of the Department of English and also tend to become active in the varied cultural life of the university community. They are introduced to the resources of the National Council of Teachers of English, whose national headquarters is in Urbana. The NCTE graciously runs a session to acquaint the Associates with the ERIC System and with the NCTE Library.

Regular grading sessions are held during both semesters, during which everyone teaching freshman rhetoric is invited to do comparative grading of selected papers, much in the style of the Educational Testing Service readings. The Associates have attended these grading sessions faithfully and have found them useful.

As a part of the Pro-Seminar, each Associate does directed reading and research into at least three major elements of writing instruction such as pre-writing, revision, spelling and the use of dictionaries, the grammars of English, writing and the brain's right hemisphere, and writing and the other arts. Members of the Pro-Seminar each produce two short papers and one long paper on topics of their choice. Associates are encouraged to aim their papers at possible publication, and it appears that one coordinated effort which is being carried on by eight members of the Pro-Seminar, including four of the Associates, may be published as a monograph.

The rhetoric advisors are regularly available to all of their advisees and work very closely with them on a continuing basis. They observe in their advisee's classes and hold follow-up conferences after these observations. Videotaping facilities are also available to any instructor who

wishes to see a playback of one of his or her classes.

Outcomes of the Program

Through the University Associates in Rhetoric Program the participants are exposed to the realities of teaching composition to freshmen students at the university level. This exposure gives them the most realistic view possible of what is expected of college students in their writing courses and of what secondary schools might best be doing to prepare students for college level work.

The Associates also have available to them the combined resources of one of the strongest graduate English faculties in the country. Many of them study formally with members of this faculty. Faculty members are available on a conference basis to all of the Associates. The Associates also make quite full use of the various libraries of the University, which has the third largest collection of any university in the country.

The University sponsors innumerable lecture series, film series, concert series, drama series, etc., and these offerings are readily available to the Associates, who generally partake more fully of them than do our regular students.

Perhaps the most valuable part of the Program occurs through the interchange which the Associates have with each other and with others who teach in the writing program. In the university setting, ideas are put forth, challenged, tested, reshaped, and refined. Within the formal setting of the Pro-Seminar in Writing, the Associates are familiarized with a broad range of research data related to the teaching of writing. Many secondary school teachers are relatively uninformed about current

research in the field because their normal teaching schedules are so demanding that they have little time for professional growth. Because most of the Associates have two day or three day-a-week schedules, they have time to avail themselves of the resources which are here easily accessible to them.

In the long term, those who participate in the Program will return to their home districts as more informed, more enthusiastic teachers. Those who enter the Program are the top teachers in their districts, and their initial excellence appears to be enhanced by their participation in the Program.

A number of school districts who have sent teachers to the Program have used or intend to use them upon their return as resource people in staff development programs. In some cases, returning Associates will be granted released time from teaching in order to carry out staff development programs on a regular basis.

Returning Associates will unquestionably be well able to provide informed counselling to college preparatory students in their home schools. Having worked in a university program will give them a breadth of understanding about the demands of college which many of their teaching colleagues will not possess.

The University of Illinois at Urbana/Champaign is fully committed to the University Associates in Rhetoric Program and feels that it is providing yet another means through which the University can have intelligent articulation with secondary schools. The fact that the program is sustained over a nine month period makes it superior in many respects to some of the

other forms of articulation in which we have engaged and are engaging, even though each of these serves a valuable and unique function. It is our expectation to sustain the program in the years ahead and to do all that we can to work with school districts and with their teachers to make the pre-college educational experience as valuable as possible for college preparatory students.